

Personal Protective Equipment

By TSgt "Mac" McDaniel, Offutt AFB, Neb.

There's been a lot of interest in motorcycle safety recently. A major focus has been on the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) that we, as Air Force members, are required to wear while operating our motorcycles.

Because I am in the Safety office, I get to see lots of graphic accidents. Man 'o man, some of them are incredible. The disturbing part is many of the injuries could have been greatly reduced or completely avoided by wearing the proper gear.

I'm guilty of learning the hard way myself. I used to ride in shorts, a T-shirt, and a "beanie" helmet. I'd cross the bridge into Iowa and toss the helmet in the ditch and retrieve it on the way back. Not any more. I have had several fairly hard "get offs" in the last 5 years — three to be exact. It seems the more I fall off, the better I dress.

Luckily, the first time I just happened to be dressed a little better than normal. My helmet was toast, jeans were shredded, and my hands were raw. After having my road rash scrubbed clean by the biggest, baddest, and least friendly nurse they could find, I made the decision that I didn't want to go through that again. Emergency rooms are not motorcycle friendly, and growing new skin is not a pleasant experience.

I have gained a lot of wisdom from my experiences and hope that everyone reading this will take heed and not repeat the

same mistakes. A good place to start this learning process is by tackling all the reasons people give for not wanting to wear their PPE. I hear all kinds of excuses and justifications when I talk to our folks, but most just don't hold water.

"It's too hot." A good jacket, helmet, and gloves will actually keep your body temperature cooler on re-

traffic, it takes very little time for the temperature to rise to an uncomfortable level. But as soon as you get moving, you'll be all right. Trust me, a small heat rash is better than road rash.

"I can't feel the controls with gloves on." Sure you can; you just have to get used to the different feel. Good leather gloves will give you a better grip and protection from road debris. Ever had a rock or June bug whack you on the knuckle at 70 miles per hour? They also offer good abrasion protection should you have to lay your bike down. What's the first thing you do when you fall? Yep, put your hands out to catch yourself. I don't see people lining up to stick their palms on a grinder — asphalt is no different.

"Riding a bike is supposed to be fun." Wearing the gear doesn't have to decrease the fun factor. If anything, it can and will increase it. Sunburns, road rash, dehydration, hypothermia, flying road debris ... those things aren't fun. The right gear will reduce fatigue, increase comfort, and protect you from the elements. If you get in the habit of wearing the gear, you'll be able to have fun much longer.

"I'm not gonna wear the orange 'I'm picking up garbage' vest." I agree. They aren't my style either. The AFI says you have to wear a jacket or vest that is brightly colored or contrasting and reflective at night. The point here is to get other motorists to see you. The

Mandatory PPE Requirements

- Approved Helmet
- Eye Protection
(Impact resistant goggles, visor, or windscreen)
- Brightly Colored/Contrasting Vest or Jacket
(Reflective at night)
- Long Sleeves
- Long Pants
- Full-Fingered Gloves
- Sturdy Shoes

ally hot days. All that hot air blowing over exposed skin dehydrates and raises — yes raises — your body temp. I know that if you get stuck in



first thing out of the other guy's mouth is "I didn't even see him." There are plenty of options available out there. Many jackets are available in bright colors and have retro-reflective material incorporated. Vests are available with your choice of reflective material, but an orange or yellow vest is usually the most visible and will keep you from becoming a car's doormat!

"They can't make me wear that." Oh really? Sure they can. It comes straight from the AFI. Failure to do so can result in disciplinary action: letter of counseling, letter of reprimand, Article 15, and/or loss of driving privileges. The bottom line: If you wear the uniform, you wear the gear! No one can dispute the fact that wearing PPE decreases injuries and lost time from the work center.

There is a ton of motorcycle-specific gear available today. Riders are no longer re-

stricted to a few choices that all look the same. There are many different styles available in several different materials from leather to Cordura and Kevlar. They are well vented, offer great abrasion resistance, many are fitted with hard armor, and often have reflective material designed right into the product. Stay away from the fashion leather and look for the purpose-made motorcycle gear. You can still look "cool" and be very comfortable and safe while doing it.

I saw a study once that tested the abrasion resistance of blue jeans, Cordura, and leather. At 50 miles per hour it took less than 3 feet to burn through the denim, 20 feet for the Cordura, and a whopping 88 feet for the leather. Let's do some math here. Last spring I hit the ground at about 45 miles per hour and slid for almost 70 feet. I could smell the burning leather, but didn't get a scratch on me. Had

I not been wearing the leathers, I would have had to take a few weeks off work to try to grow back skin that would have been lost after the first few feet. I'd much rather show off a scuffed jacket than scars.

We need to make sure other folks see us and that we have some protection in the event of getting up close and personal with the pavement. As I said, this is a requirement not an option for military members. These requirements apply any time you are on your bike, on or off base. It doesn't have to be as discouraging as some folks make it seem. Wearing good gear will actually increase the comfort and enjoyment of your ride. I don't know anyone that plans to have an accident, but we can plan to be prepared in case we do. Dress for the fall, not the ride.

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